NEW FICTION —IN— VARIED FORMS

THE TREASURE OF GOLDEN CAP. By Bennet Copplestone. E. P. Dutton & Co.

ALTHOUGH there is a certain clumsiness in the introductory section of this composite story, which may make it hard for the reader to get well started in interest, it is on the whole an unusually attractive book. It is really two stories, one of to-day and one of three centuries ago, woven together nicely enough to make a coherent whole, though the romance of the early seventeenth century remains entirely separable, being rather artificially imbedded in the center of the book. And this old romance is by far the best of the story; in fact, it might gain by being allowed to stand alone, for it is, in itself, a very fine bit—a little historical, picaresque novelette of piracy, privateering and high romance. This part of the book moves smoothly, rapidly and steadily to a tragic climax; it is peopled by vividly imagined folk and is moving in its emotion.

But it takes a long while to get back to it. The tale opens in 1920 "in the mud of Bridport Harbour, at 2 o'clock of a summer morning," and came near to ending there, for the first scene displays old Richard Nutt, helplessly drunk and mired in the mud while the tide is rising about him. His cries for help finally bring the necessary rescuer, one Dickie Grenville, out of bed, and the ancient wastrel is duly pulled out and put to bed. Nutt is a true Devonshire man, and so is Dickie. And Dickie's sister Betty is even more Devonshirish. Nutt is the ultimate descendant of a family of at least nine generations of seafaring men, and, of course, he owns an old sea chest and a Mystery. He prattles of a "Treasure" and, after a truly heroic death (a well told incident), he bequeaths his chest and its secret to Betty and Dickie. So the treasure hunt is begun.

The contents of the chest include the log and journal of an earlier Capt. Richard Nutt, who flourished from 1620 to 1634, and out of this record is compiled the history of that strenuous life. Captain Richard was a privateer and occasionally an out and out pirate; also a politician. Such a gallant sailor had to have an extraordinary love affair, so he fished a Bretonne girl out of the Bay of Biscay, after she had jumped overboard from a piratical Turkish ship. Their subsequent adventures, leading to her death and her very singular burial make a strenuously interesting tale, which fills the whole second section of the book.

Finally the modern heirs of this pirate chief go hunting, with success, for his buried treasure, the nature of which is evident enough to the reader. It is handled with poetic skill, to a glamorous conclusion, and the third book of the story is freer than the first from the author's occasional elephantine playfulness and unnecessary addiction to too cumbrous machinery. The tale of seventeenth century adventure on the high seas is good enough, however, to make one readily forgive minor faults in the rest of the story.

THE MONEY GODS. By Ellery H. Clark. Cornhill Publishing Company.

ALTHOUGH its plot is a fantastic absurdity there is an engaging quality about this yarn; it keeps one interested in spite of its impossibilities. Maybe it is a pity that the mighty magnates of Wall Street are not in real life quite like the malevolent demi-gods of the story; if they were big business would be far more entertaining than it is. One likes to picture the familiar leaders of high finance meeting in a subterranean cellar, the entrances to which lead through a movable picture frame in the magnate's country house, and down a hole in the woods beside the golf links. It is pleasant to picture, for instance, the late J. P. Morgan crawling down a tunnel under the forest to conspire. The theme of the yarn is the good old system, the control of the market by four super-manipulators who run everything. A combination of enterprising youngsters learns the awful secret and tries to participate with disastrous results.

The numerous murders thus made necessary are nicely carried out, as might be expected, for such powerful and intelligent ogres would, of course, use original methods in their killing. There is especially a fine touch in bringing in an antique crossbow as a lethal agency. At the other extreme is poison gas, and though gas "came in" with the war for the uses of murderers in fiction, it is used here with freshness of method.

RED EAGLE OF THE MEDICINE WAY. By Marion Reid Girardot. Cornhill Publishing Company.

THERE is a good deal of excellent raw material for historico-romantic fiction in this tale, but it is inefficiently used, though much of the incidental detail is highly picturesque. One feels, somehow, that the author has rather missed her vocation in trying to make a novel of statutory measurements out of the thing. She sees detail clearly and can draw it to good results, but the romance, as a story, is not good enough to carry the rest. It is a tale of the Forty-Niners and of the great trek across the continent. The best things in the book are the descriptions of some of these pioneers: the young Jew, "fresh from the old country," who had loaded his few possessions on a wheelbarrow and confidently expected to push it fifteen hundred miles across the continent; the man whose cart had a sail intended to help it along, and similar oddities. The titular hero is a half breed; a mongrel of French, gypsy and Indian; a kind of partially civilized yellow dog. There is a French girl for him to abduct and carry off to the Blackfeet country, and so on.

LADY AVIS TREWITHEN. By Beatrice Chase. Longmans, Green & Co.

WITH slight alterations, and some repairs, this would have made a good Gilbert and Sullivan libretto—but it is all very seriously meant, as the writer is entirely innocent of any humorous intent. It is one of a series of Dartmoor novels, which have had a considerable vogue in England, and there is a certain superficial charm about some of it, a real feeling for the moors and a spirit of sentimental romance, thinly poetical. But for the rest it is rather an absurdity. The very noble Lady Avis decides to go and live among the "common people" in order to get close to the great heart of nature, and learn to "know humanity" in its normal state and not "from a pinnacle above them." So she poses as a servant who has inherited a small fortune, and goes to live the life of the lowly. Of course she succeeds miraculously and everybody is uplifted and enlightened, and there is a wedding at the end.

YEZAD. By George Babcock. Cooperative Publishing Company.

THIS is a noteworthy literary curiosity. There is an anecdote of the late Commodore Vanderbilt, which records that upon being asked what he thought of a certain man, who may be called Smith, since that was not his name, he exploded: "What do I think of Smith? Well, I've met a good many (qualified) fools in my time but I never met any one who was so many *kinds* of a blankety-blank fool as Smith!" The past year has brought forth some queer books but none that is so many kinds of a queer thing as this. Its subtitle, aptly, is a "Romance of the Unknown." The first half of the book is devoted to getting the hero, one John Bacon, properly dropped into the "Beyond" and to a very long, retrospective digression recording some remarkable "scientific" experiments, covering twenty-five years or so, by one Doctor Klouse, who was not satisfied with what he supposed to be the Darwinian theory of evolution, and who set out to "prove" that man is of divine origin. That he quite failed to understand the theory of evolution at all is perhaps immaterial. His experiments are no less entertaining.

The second half of the book takes the discarnate John on a long gallop through Space and lands him on a planet near Vega, where he receives instruction from one Marcomet, a "perfected" ex-Martian, ten feet tall and extremely verbose. After a little cosmic philosophy, Br'er Marcomet tells (for nearly 200 pages) a lively romance of love and intrigue among the Martians, many million years ago—the tale of Christopher Spencer, Charlotte Dudley and the villain, Felix Claudio! The reader feels that the author has missed a trick in naming Marcomet; he should have been called Jones; John W. Jones.

That suggests one of the queernesses of the book. Mr. Babcock is capable of really excellent passages of rather high flying narrative but he invariably drops from a dignified level to the uttermost depths of bathos, usually in the attempt to lug in some comic relief. The transition from good enough English to a parody of ancient Bowery slang is a unique effect—especially on the part of Martians of millions of years ago.

The central thread of the book, so far as it has any, is the idea of reincarnation. A part of this is a doctrine of a duality in each person; a good and bad section. These are separable at death and the good is duly scheduled to triumph in the remote future. There is, of course, nothing new here, but its method of presentation is odd.

A Child's Story of American Literature

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vigor. No one without Webster's physical grandeur could have spoken the way he did, it is true; but no amount of physical grandeur could make us feel his force to-day if it were not for the fire of thought behind his thundering sentences. Orations are like national songs—they do not have to be literature to be successful. But only that oratory is literature which stirs us by its thought after the voice of the speaker and the passions of the hour are stilled.

By the side of this eagle statesman Noah Webster was but a blackbird. Yet he dared to oppose him sometimes for all that. For you must not think that Noah was a writer only. There was one element in the patriotism of that day which we have very unfortunately lost, and which we feel we must strive to bring back again. Then every educated man felt himself in honor bound to engage in politics. Political affairs were not left, as too often they are now, to people who make their living in politics. He compiled his dictionary with and by his pen, but he got a copyright law passed with and by his activity as a politician. So you see, he not only supplied future writers with the words they were going to use but he made sure of the bread they were going to eat. And, splendid to relate, his dictionary was the first book published under the new copyright law.

Up to that time any dishonest publisher could rob not only the author but also the original publisher of their just profits. We have seen the early Post Office refusing to handle printed matter; now here was Congress refusing to recognize that there was such a thing as literary property! This is another curious illustration of the old idea that authors must work for us for nothing. Webster sold his Spelling Book to publishers in Boston, Albany, New York, and Philadelphia as was the custom in those days with successful books. The difficulties of transportation were so great then that publishers were not likely to interfere with each other's trade. The old gentleman kept trotting from one to another all the time he was writing his dictionary and searching our libraries and trying to persuade Congressmen that if literary property wasn't the same as any other property, at least a publisher's investment should have as much protection as any other business man's investment.

American literature, both of these mighty works considered, owes a vast deal to these keen birdlike eyes of his. And if young America grew decidedly cocky on a diet of his school readers, it was very far from the old gentleman's intention to give them the idea that they could afford to rest on their oars. For the blackbird saw even farther than the eagle in one respect. He saw not only the troubles of the day as did Daniel, but he saw what was likely to be America's chief trouble. "They consider the Revolution completed when it is but just begun. Having raised the pillars of the building, they seem to forget that the whole superstructure is yet to be added."